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DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE WITH COLONEL STEPHEN TWITTY, COMMANDER, 4TH BRIGADE COMBAT TEAM, 1ST CAVALRY DIVISION, MULTINATIONAL DIVISION-NORTH VIA TELECONFERENCE FROM IRAQ

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CHARLES "JACK" HOLT (chief, New Media Operations, OASD PA): Hello. Colonel Twitty?

COL. TWITTY: Yes.

MR. HOLT: Yes, sir, Jack Holt, OSD. Welcome to the Bloggers Roundtable.

COL. TWITTY: Hey! How are you doing?

MR. HOLT: All right, sir. Colonel Stephen Twitty, commander of the

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COL. TWITTY: Can you hear me okay?

MR. HOLT: Yes, sir. Got you loud and clear.

Colonel Stephen Twitty, commander of the 4th Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, Multinational Division-North, up in the Nineveh area.

And Colonel Twitty, welcome to the Bloggers Roundtable this morning. And if you have an opening statement, sir, the floor is yours.

COL. TWITTY: Yes. It's Colonel Stephen Twitty, by the way. (Correcting the pronunciation of "Stephen.")

MR. HOLT: Okay.

COL. TWITTY: And once again, I'm the commander of the 4th Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division. And I just want to set the stage for how we're operating here in Nineveh province.

We assumed command of the battlespace in December, and when we assumed command, we quickly transitioned from one -- correction -- from two battalions in Mosul to one battalion in Mosul, and we took the battalion that we had intended to be in Mosul and made it what we

call the Super-MiTT, which is the Military Training Team. And that battalion has done an outstanding job training the Iraqi army, and that's its mission focus.

We also have a battalion that's out in the Tall Afar area that works the western part of Nineveh province. And then we have a battalion that's down in our southern battlespace along the Tigris River Valley.

And we've seen some interesting dynamics here in the province over the last couple of months. When we first arrived here we were averaging 15 to 18 attacks a day. Around March time frame, we averaged around 10 to 13 attacks. And today we averaged somewhere between seven to nine attacks a day throughout the province.

And I attribute that to several things. The first one is the training level and proficiency of the Iraqi army and Iraqi police here. We have two divisions here and we also have 20,000 Iraqi police, for a total of 40,000 Iraqi security forces, and they're all fighting here in Nineveh province.

And then second one is the aggressive operations that we have conducted in order to go after the insurgency and in particular al Qaeda. We increased those operations when the attacks went in Baqubah, in order to maintain pressure up here and to prevent the flow of insurgents coming up to our location.

So overall, progress is steady in terms of security, and security has also led us to conduct a lot of projects throughout the province and has allowed the local government here to focus on our projects as well.

And with that, I'm ready for your questions.

MR. HOLT: Okay. Thank you, sir.

Jarred. (Pause.) Jarred Fishman, you were first on line. So why don't you get us started?

Q Great. Thank you, sir.

Good afternoon. When we put out reports about the good news that's happening in Nineveh, throughout your ops, could you cite the biggest -- or I saw from the presentation there were a lot of arms caches that had been found recently, but what would be the one thing that you would get out, if someone could hear about what's going on in your area of operations, that you would want them to know, in the last few weeks?

COL. TWITTY: Yeah, I think the one thing that we're not telling the story on is the great work that the Iraqi army and the Iraqi police are doing up here. They are at a pretty good training level here, and they're taking the fight to the enemy here. Most of the operations that are conducted are led by them now.

Of course, I focused a lot on al Qaeda, but they're doing the day-to-day lifting of fighting the terrorists in this province.

And if you take a look at this province, this is the largest province in Iraq. But you have -- and you got the second-largest city in Iraq, Mosul. But it only has one battalion now. And that is truly a testament to the great strength of the Iraqi security forces that are out there fighting throughout Mosul. So it is truly the Iraqi security forces and their capability.

MR. HOLT: All right, sir.

Bill Roggio.

Q Hello, Colonel Twitty. It's Bill Roggio with The Fourth Rail. I have a question concerning operations against al Qaeda in Iraq's network. The -- it seems that on a near daily basis you're detaining several members of the leadership network and operatives. Have you -- can you paint us a picture of al Qaeda's network up in the Nineveh province and what is its relationship with the Islamic Army in Iraq, Ansar al-Sunna? Paint a picture of al Qaeda, basically, and its cooperation with the Sunni insurgency.

COL. TWITTY: Yeah. I will tell you what I can tell you without going into the secret realm of this thing.

I see the biggest threat in the Nineveh province being al Qaeda in Iraq, and with the second threat being Ansar al-Sunna. I see Ansar al-Sunna and al Qaeda in Iraq -- it is pretty much a marriage of convenience.

They will get together and coordinate attacks throughout the province whenever it's necessary to do so, and let me define necessary to do so.

The last time we had somewhat of a large-scale attack here was on 16 May, when the nine VBIEDS happened throughout Nineveh province -- most of those ineffective -- and were stopped by the Iraqi security forces. But we saw where Ansar al-Sunna and various other insurgents group coordinated with al Qaeda to pull this particular attack off. And we do know that the Iraqis, the -- excuse me, Islamic State of Iraq is pushing to gain a larger foothold here in Nineveh province.

We're watching that very carefully. And as you know from previous operations, the more you put pressure south of us, particularly Baghdad and Diyala, they have a tendency to move to other locations. And we're watching that very carefully.

We have a pretty good idea of the structure. And as you stated, we've attacked al Qaeda very hard over these past couple of months. And we've killed and detained a lot of leaders. But just as we kill them and detain them, they have a tendency to regenerate those leaders very quickly. We've seen where they're struggling with regenerating good, qualified leaders, and that's something we're watching as well.

And I hope I answered your question.

Q Thank you, sir.

MR. HOLT: Andrew Lubin, you're up next.

Q Good afternoon, Colonel. This is Andrew Lubin from U.S. Cavalry ON Point.

Last week, we were talking with General Gaskin from Fallujah about foreign fighters.

COL. TWITTY: Right.

Q And he indicated that the ones that are coming in aren't coming in directly into Anbar but they're coming in from the north, circling around, really into your AO, and then trying too head south. Are you running into more foreign fighters than you were, say, you know, six or eight months, nine months ago?

COL. TWITTY: Yeah, in the nine months I've been here, I will tell you, I'm not seeing a huge flow of foreign fighters. We have captured and we killed a few. But that has only been probably, if I had to just estimate, probably about 12 foreign fighters. We had a couple from Saudi Arabia, a couple from Syria, one from Qatar, one from Kuwait, one from Libya. Along the border area, which I command, all the way to the Iraqi-Syrian border, we have -- through operations out in that area, we have detained one since I've been here, and he was Saudi Arabian.

But I've got to tell you, I'm just not seeing a huge flow of foreign fighters throughout the province.

That's not to say that there are none coming in. Just with the hard work that we're doing to try and catch them, we're just not catching them and we're just not seeing it. But we're working it hard, and I just don't see it where they're coming through.

Q Okay, great. Thank you.

MR. HOLT: Bruce McLain (sp).

Q Hey, sir. Bruce McLain with Q&O.net. My question has to do with EPRTs and PRTs. I assume you're working with them, and I'd just like to get your ideas or thoughts on how effective they've been and what you've been able to do with them.

COL. TWITTY: That's great, because I think it is an absolutely great idea. I have a PRT up here in Nineveh province, Dr. Jim Knight (sp). He just departed and a new one has come in the lead. And because of the security situation here, we have been able to get them out and about the battlespace here. I escort them to various locations. We've been able to get a bunch of projects completed as a result of their hard efforts. They spend a lot of time with the

provincial government here, as well as I do.

And I view, when it comes to the governance of this province and the projects that occur on this province, we work hand in hand. We have periodic meetings where we chart our way through on how we're going to continue to support the people here through governance and projects and so forth. A great asset. And I think it was the right thing to do to put the PRT with the Brigade Combat Teams.

MR. HOLT: And Grim with Blackfive, you're up next.

Q Morning. I wanted to ask you what measures of effectiveness are you using to track popular commitment among Iraqis to the central government. I've heard enlistment to the police or the ISF, number of tips coming in, things like that. Could you give us a sense of what, exactly, you're tracking and how those things are tracking?

COL. TWITTY: Yes. I could barely hear you. You sound like you have something in the background on. Could you repeat your question? You came in very broken.

Q I'm sorry. It's actually --

COL. TWITTY: All I heard was measures of effectiveness.

Q All right. I'll try again. What measures of effectiveness are you using to track popular commitment to the central government? I have heard other officers say they are tracking recruitment to the ISF or the police or they're using number of tips coming in. I'm wondering what you guys are using where you are and how they're going.

COL. TWITTY: I gotcha. Yes, I got you. I just couldn't hear you the first time.

I can tell that you've been around the military, because you're using "measures of effectiveness" here. Here are a couple of things. First of all, we're getting ready to stand up 3,000 new Iraqi police in Mosul. We're getting ready to stand up one battalion in the 2nd Iraqi Army Division that will be in Mosul, and we're getting ready to stand up two Iraqi battalions in the 3rd Iraqi Army.

And there's a couple of reasons why we're standing these up.

First of all, the Sunnis that have largely been left out of the Iraqi security forces have now come to me and said, "Hey, I want to be a part of the police, and I want to be a part of the army."

These units were supposed to grow anyway. We're ensuring that all these elements that we're standing up -- we're ensuring that they're predominantly Sunni. And this is part of a reconciliation package that we're putting together, because this is what the people want.

This province is 45 percent Sunni, 40 percent Kurds, 10 percent other -- Yezidi, Christians and so forth. But when you look at the

Iraqi army, it's predominantly Kurds. So we have to change that and bring the Sunnis in as part of the Iraqi security forces.

We will start opening up the polls here in the 3rd Iraqi Army on the 29th. I've met with the various sheikhs, and it's been overwhelming the amount of names that they've given. We will grow these battalions over a matter of (night ?), based on the sheikhs committed to providing these names.

We've already started the recruitment of the Sunnis in the police. It started two weeks ago. I said 3,000. We've gotten 18 Sunnis from Mosul to join the police.

So that is the measure of effective -- this is what the people want. Here we're opening up these venues, the police and the army, to provide for you. The measure of effectiveness is now, okay, come to the table to join.

The second measure of effectiveness is the HUMINT reporting, the human intelligence. We've seen a huge increase in the amount of human intelligence that we're getting in order to fight this insurgency. That was not the case when we first got here. And the reason for that is the attacks that happened on 16 May with al Qaeda. In my view, the people got fed up with those, and they start turning that. And we took advantage of that, and we started an aggressive campaign to counter with the information operations and our own OPTEMPO operations that we conducted.

Q Thank you.

MR. HOLT: All right.

Paul Silva.

Q Good afternoon, Colonel. This is Paul Silva from Techography.

You had made reference to the increased training capability and capacity of Iraqi security forces and police, and now you just also spoke to the increasing numbers of Iraqi police and security enforcers you'll be standing up. I was hoping you would be able to comment on the security forces' logistics and supply capacity. And that comes from comments recently made in -- (inaudible) -- by the Iraqi ambassador and piece out today by the AP.

COL. TWITTY: I have not seen it, but I can definitely talk about the Iraqi logistics capacity. And I'm not afraid to tell you where these forces are weak. And that is one definite location that we need to put a lot of pressure on the Iraqi government. And that is to provide the proper logistics and maintenance capability for not only the Iraqi army and the Iraqi police. They cannot properly sustain themselves, and I can name a couple of areas. They have problems sustaining themselves with fuel. They have problems sustaining themselves with ammo. They have problems sustaining themselves with uniforms, and on and on and on.

So a must for this army in order for it to operate is, we have to build up its logistics and maintenance capability, because that's where I see -- where it is really suffering.

We are training them in the logistics and maintenance area, but it takes more than training. You have to provide the goods for the soldiers in order for the vehicles to operate, in order for them to get the uniforms, in order for them to have ammunition to fight the terrorists and so forth.

Q Very good, thank you, sir.

COL. TWITTY: I hope I answered your question.

Q Yes, sir, you did. Thank you.

MR. HOLT: Okay, Ed Morrissey.

Q Good morning, Colonel Twitty.

My question is this: Are the people in the province there, the locals in the province, aware of the debate that's going on in Congress right now about whether or not to pull out of Iraq? And has that damaged -- have you seen any damage to that HUMINT reporting that you've been talking about? Has that made them a little bit more fearful about trusting the Americans?

COL. TWITTY: Absolutely, this is what I am seeing. Just about every person that I come in contact in on a daily basis, they're wondering whether we're going to stay or whether we're going to go. It comes up daily here in the province.

And many -- I will be honest with you -- many of us -- I mean, many of them do not understand. And I hear often, okay, you came here; you liberated us and now you're going to walk away from us when we need you the most. I hear that almost daily. And in fact, some locals are scared to talk to us because they think that we're going to be leaving and they're going to be left to fend for themselves in fighting al Qaeda and all these other insurgent groups.

So yes, I hear it almost daily.

MR. HOLT: Matt Armstrong.

Q Good morning, Colonel Twitty. Thank you.

COL. TWITTY: Good morning.

Q Question is about controlling the narrative. It's issue that came up with Jarred's question, Grim and then the question just now. You started off with saying that we're not telling the story completely about how the Iraqis are putting up a great fight and great leadership. It's difficult to be winning if nobody knows that we're winning.

COL. TWITTY: Yes.

Q So my question is -- and you also mentioned about the aggressive IO to capitalize on the over-aggressiveness of AQ. But can you tell me, tell us, what is being done to correct this? And can you actually provide any example of proactive or pre-emptive IO?

COL. TWITTY: You're speaking IO towards our own country and telling the story of us winning.

Q Well, of course not, we don't do IO against the U.S.; that's called PA -- no, in Iraqi, in Iraq and elsewhere.

COL. TWITTY: Well, yeah, but you mixed Iraqi; you mixed U.S. So I'm trying to figure out what you're saying.

Q I'm sorry. I mean locally. What I'm saying, we're not winning if nobody knows. I'm speaking more regionally in Iraq and the Middle East. You don't really have an issue of foreign fighters coming in, so it doesn't sound like you have to counter external support. But how are you dealing with -- how are you managing information operations to get the word out? And do you have any examples of proactive or preemptive IO?

COL. TWITTY: Okay, now I have you. I understand what you're saying. I've spent a lot of times with -- a lot of time with several elements here in the province. The first one I've spent a lot of time with are the sheikhs. I spend an awful lot of time with them.

And one of the things that was quickly revealing to me when I got here, that there are a lot of sheikhs in this province because it is the largest province in Iraq. Therefore, we must get the sheikhs involved not only in the security process -- and I will -- I can talk more about that in a few minutes, but we also got to get them involved in our own IO campaign. And I meet with the sheikhs intensively to ensure they hear the good, the bad and the ugly, and that we get the word out of the things that we're doing project-wise, that we get the word out of who we're fighting in terms of whether it's al Qaeda or Ansar al-Sunna and so forth. So we have a myriad of things that we talk to sheikhs about.

Hello?

MR. HOLT: Yes, go ahead.

Q Hello?

COL. TWITTY: You still there?

MR. HOLT: Yes, we are.

COL. TWITTY: Okay. The second is, I meet with the provincial leaders. All the mayors, all the police chiefs, all the brigade commanders and the division commanders, I meet with. That meeting is

conducted once a month with the mayors, weekly with the Iraqi army and police chiefs. We use them as a conduit to get the word out as well.

The third I meet with, I routinely go out throughout this province. In Mosul, any city, you name it, I've been in. We have an aggressive IO campaign in these cities that we go to in order to get the word out. And it's not only against the enemy, it is here are the projects that we're doing for you. Here are when we think provincial elections will be.

The other thing that we've done here is we're paying for the satellite TVs up here so that the Iraqi government here, the provincial government, the police chiefs, the Iraqi commanders can get their word out, because it's important that not only we do good information operations, that the government conducts good information operations and the leadership of this province.

So I hope I answered your question.

Q You did. Thank you very much.

MR. HOLT: Okay, sir. Colonel Stephen Twitty is with us this morning on the Bloggers Roundtable. We've got just a couple of minutes left. Do we have any follow-up questions? (No response.)

All right. Colonel Twitty, I know your time is valuable, and we really appreciate you taking the time being with us this morning. And hopefully, we can speak to you again. Thank you very much, sir.

COL. TWITTY: Hey, for all you on the line, I appreciate you all taking your time. We've found that it is extremely hard to get media up here. And I know the focus has been largely on Baghdad. But thank you all for taking your time to hear about Nineveh province.

Q Appreciate the time, Colonel.

Q Thanks, Colonel.

MR. HOLT: Thank you, sir, very much.

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